

ABORIGINAL POPULATION

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Sri Gupta, in conclusion, has been tempted to emphasise with firm conviction that the Andamanese are, therefore, very probably a remnant of the dwellers on the marshes of Bengal and the uplands of Santhal Paragana or the dense forests of Burma and Malaya.

As regards the native appellations and phonetic similarity, such apparent similarity is possibly evidenced in many groups separated from each other by long distances. Similarly, the diet of raw meat and fish is and was common to all hunting and collecting tribes of the world. Independent evolution of many tribes has been akin to each other and therefore, the further geological studies and studies in anthropology can only confirm the idea.

Since the arrival of the Andamanese in the islands, a gradual separation has taken place among the different branches of population who had moved to different parts of the islands. The micro-environment has exerted considerable influence in moulding these people ultimately giving birth to a number of sub-groups. However, the broad generalisations are their hunting and collecting economy, complete ignorance about the domestication of the plants and the animals, except the Onges who have learnt only for the last 30 years the domestication of dogs. Family is the smallest social unit and a few families constitute the communal hut. Each tribal sub-group has its hunting territory, within which it maintains a more or less nomadic life till they return to the main settlement where they have a communal hut.

The doctrine of the environmental determinism exemplifies itself in the adaptation of the aborigines to the local environment. In their life, they never look beyond their local geography and the materials for houses, the food, the ornaments and every thing that they are in need of, are collected from the small territory in which a community lives. So the obvious conclusion may be drawn that the coastal tribes are dependent on fishing, turtle hunting and gathering of shells and oysters and the interior tribes on hunting. This type of primitive economy, based on hunting and collecting, cannot support more than two to four persons per square mile as against more than 300 per square mile in agricultural lands and again the density varies to a great extent according to the type of agriculture practised e.g., rice-growing regions support the maximum density of population. In spite of their all-round self-sufficiency they have some connections with the later settlers. For the want of iron, tobacco, distilled liquor, opium etc., these aborigines (jarawas) either make periodic raids on the settlements (Onges and Andamanese) or have established friendly relations with the settlers. The necessity

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The contact of the Onges with the outsiders can only be traced since the efforts of M. V. Portman¹ to establish a friendly relation with these tribes from 1886 onwards. However the earlier contacts with the Chinese and Japanese were possible because these people used to frequent the shores of Little Andaman for collecting the valuable shells and the Onges used to be engaged by them as divers and in reciprocation they were given presents of alcohol and opium. In the initial stage of the attempt for establishing a friendly relation by Portman, the Onges proved themselves hostile which was evidenced from the poor fate of the crews of a ship 'Assam Valley' when it touched the shores of Little Andaman and it was through the great efforts of the punitive expedition led by W. L. Much that the dead bodies of the crews were recovered. Later on, a few Onges, all on a sudden, arrived at Cinque Island and were captured by M. V. Portman. Only 9 of them were detained and the rest 15 were released. These few captured Onges were closely observed and studied in Port Blair by Portman and were ultimately returned back to their native land, Little Andaman. The friendly treatment and the presents that these Onges had received from Portman, paved the path of establishing friendly relations with the Onges much easier and also made the subsequent visits of the foreigners much more welcome. After Portman, a few more contacts were made with the Onges by Prof. Lapicque in March, 1893, during the operations of 1911 and 1921, undertaken by Eickstedt, a German anthropologist, in 1827, by Dr. B. S. Guha, Ex-Director Anthropological Survey of India in 1948 and by Lidio Cipriani, an Italian anthropologist in the year 1954 and in a few succeeding years. Still the knowledge about the Onges seems to be meagre.

Living exclusively in the Little Andaman and a few of them in the Rutland Island, the Onges live in groups on a septal basis with clear-cut boundaries of hunting group for each group. There is no permanent habitation or village of the Onges in any part of the Little Andaman and their huts are of two types—(a) the permanent type of communal hut called *bera*, and (b) the temporary type of shelter called *korale*.

The abundance of food and water has made the life of the Onges comparatively easy-going. All the groups are headed by a leader and each group is assigned a fixed territory. The community life seems to be extremely democratic in character which entertains and also maintains a perfect individual freedom and only in times of necessity, advice,

1 Portman, M. V.—History of one relations with the Andamanese.

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136 were approaching an Onge camp. Everywhere they go they are accompanied by flies of all sizes, and in Little Andaman the swarms are so bad that the first stranger to land called a river after them, Bumila Creek, or fly river. Their flies betray the Onges long before the barking of their dogs - no human voice ever betrays their silent presence.

628 On Little Andaman today the Onges' tacit divisions of territory
 423 are of little importance, so heavy has been the fall in population,
 123 but they still keep out of areas belonging to other 'huts', even if the huts themselves have been abandoned. I never saw any disputes over territory, or the ownership of the area in which a pig was caught (and hence ownership of the pig). The Onges who accompanied me, possibly encouraged by the prestige value of a European with them, hunted wherever we went without anyone raising any protests. Nevertheless, I always took the precaution of giving anything I or my Indians took to the Onges of the nearest hut, invariably much to their delight.

342 Contrary to established opinion, communal huts on Little
 361 Andaman are not found only along the coasts; the majority, and certainly the best constructed, are in the interior. Togalanghe is one, and there are a number of permanently abandoned temporary camps near it.

342 Both the permanent and temporary huts or shelters of the
 197 Andamans resemble those of the Semang. The latter are extremely simple, especially in the dry season; there are no walls and only a very sloping roof of leaves, high at the front and very low at the back, the beds being put so that the feet face the low part of the roof. With the Semang and Aeta the beds may be made of bamboo; this is never the case in the Andamans, as there are no large bamboos in the archipelago (Brown was wrong in this respect. The few slender bamboos on Little Andaman are only usable for making drying racks, which are found only round the hut at Beniabol in the south. As the people were away when I went there, and the site was consequently completely deserted, I was unable to establish visually what they dried, but traces of fish, particularly pilchards, were indication enough.)

342 These temporary shelters are put up extremely quickly. Two poles less than two metres long for the front, and two more, thirty to forty centimetres long, for the back, are fixed firmly into the

HARVEST OF HONEY

less plentiful and containing a great deal of wax, and is greatly prized by the Onges. The darker bees, common in China, Celebes, Borneo and beyond, build their nests in cavities in the rocks, or in tree-trunks. Their honey, darker and with less wax, is more plentiful, but not so fine; when there is enough of the golden honey the Onges ignore the darker variety. 136
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Few of the fruits on Little Andaman contain much sugar, but the Onges eat more than enough honey to compensate any deficiency that would otherwise occur. Whatever the fruit in season, men, women and children climb happily about like acrobats, hanging in the trees to get at it and the honey that goes with it. To chop the tree down is, of course, easiest and the obvious first choice for any Onge. Failing this, and their hooked poles, they climb up the nearby lianas into the branches, or walk up the trunk - an easy feat for them with their very long arms and almost prehensile toes. 222
[146]

Although there are arak nuts and betel leaves in the forest, the Onges ignore them. They are the same variety as elsewhere; *Arecia catechu* and *Piper betel*. The Nicobarese are so addicted to them that many have lips and teeth hideously deformed as a result, but this is quite unknown among the Onges, contrary to earlier reports. The appearance of addiction in the Nicobars may have occurred after the separation of the peoples. 137
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With all these fruits the Onges consume vast quantities of honey from the two species of bee, *dorsata* and *nigrocinta*. During the rainy season they can only get at the darker, poorer honey of *nigrocinta*, which builds nests under boulders or in crevices of trees or rocks. The Onges' real honey orgies occur, therefore, in the dry season, when the honey birds (*Indicationidae*), common in Africa and all over Asia, lead them to the trees where the golden honey of *dorsata* is hidden. 222
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When one of the Onges finds a nest of bees he puts a mark on the rock or tree as a sign of ownership. None of the others would then dare to take possession of it, for fear of punishment by the group,¹ but when the time comes to take the honey everyone helps in the hard work of getting at the nest and opening it up. On one trip from Labanar to Togalanghe, on 19 March 1954, the Onges pointed out over twenty *Nigrocinta* nests to me, all reserved ready for use 222
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¹ However deep in the forest a crime is committed, it will inevitably be discovered in the end, and punished by banishment from the community. [627]

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222 when the supply of *dorsata* diminished at the onset of the stormy
 [423] season, when the gales lashing the branches dislodge the nests and
 hurl them to the ground.

Unlike the beekeepers of the civilized world, the Onges make no attempt to protect their bare bodies while they are extracting honey. Yet they are never stung, and watching them one felt in the presence of some age-old mystery, lost by the civilized world. I watched an Onge from the ground with my field glasses as he climbed up a tree to a *dorsata* nest and saw him, as it were, blowing on the bees round about the trunk as he went up. As he approached the nest they huddled round it in a protective cloud, hiding it completely from view. Suddenly, as the Onge's face came within twenty centimetres of the boiling, humming mass, the bees seemed to shrink back as he blew on them. Not one moved to attack as he gouged out the combs with his bare hands, throwing handfuls of bees out into the air. And then the whole cloud of bees gathered into a swarm and left the tree and the nest to the interloper.

[283] The Onge stripped lengths of green bark from the lianas growing
 up the tree, and then broke the nest up. Tying the combs to his back
 with the strips of bark he lowered himself down to the ground,
 222 swinging like an ape from liana to liana. There, while his friends
 515 fell on the honey, he calmly cleaned himself down - with not one
 sting on him. This he did in a way unusual for the Onges, filling
 his mouth with water from a nearby pond and squirting it into his
 cupped hands, until he had enough in his hands for a perfunctory
 rub down. This method of washing is common in primitive peoples
 but advanced for the Onges. When they have been painting them-
 selves with the usual fat and ochre paste, for example, the women
 will clean their hands to their satisfaction by wiping them on their
naquinegbe, while the men use the dogs' coats as a convenient towel.

222 In March 1952, in the middle of the honey season, I was on the
 west coast of Little Andaman, near Nachuge. Twelve Onges were
 with me, and when they noticed a bees' nest high up in a *Pterocarpus*
 the youngest of them at once climbed up after it. As soon as he saw
 that the combs were full of honey, with no larvae, he called for a
 [283] container. With amazing speed he tore enough bark off the nearest
 liana with his teeth to make a cord over twenty metres long and
 the hollowed-out log was soon hauled up, to come down again
 crammed with combs brimming with pale golden honey, very